Managerial Leadership in Perspective: Getting Back to Basics by Burt K. Scanlan.

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Managerial Leadership In Perspective: Getting Back to Basics

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Over the past several years, a number of frameworks have been developed for examining the leadership function. Emphasis has ranged from those which identify alternative styles of management, with either a direct or indirect suggestion that there is one best style, to those which are clearly contingency theories maintaining that the appropriate style is dependent on any number of variables. All of the various frameworks serve several valuable purposes: 1) they stimulate a degree of serious thought among managers about the dynamics of this important function, 2) they help managers to gain insight into what their own style of management is, 3) they help managers understand why they get the reaction they do either in general or in a given situation, and 4) they suggest alternative styles of leadership.

Unfortunately, while training and developing managers in accordance with these various theories, we have lost sight of some of the basic ingredients of results-oriented leadership and need to return to fundamentals. In addition, to some extent at least, we have created a sort of hesitancy about leadership which can work to the disadvantage of the organization, the individual manager and the employees.

With the above thoughts in mind, let's look at several key elements of effective leadership which have either gotten lost in the shuffle or become obscured. They are not magical, nor do they represent brilliant new theories, but to the veteran manager, these ideas will probably make good common sense. For the newer supervisor, they may help clear away some of the obscurity surrounding leadership.

Let People Know What Is Expected

A coach will tell us that every player must know what is expected on a particular play—not just what is expected in terms of blocking the defensive end, but the results to be achieved, e.g., knocking the opponent down or holding him to the outside for a minimum of two seconds. People must know what is expected not only from the standpoint of the typical job description which describes physical responsibilities, but in terms of results to be achieved from those activities. The superior and subordinate must reach mutual agreement in five basic areas, including:

- **The work that an employee does or the major activities for which he or she is responsible**
- **Where the job fits into the total picture and why it is important**
- **The factors upon which performance will be judged, such as quality, quantity, cost, innovation, estimation of accuracy, self-development and service to other people or departments**
- **How performance will be measured. It may be through quantitative measures or a series of statements describing the conditions which will exist when that area of the job has been adequately performed**
- **Specific minimum results or standards of performance which should be met in each of the above areas of accountability as they apply to the job.**

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Style of management is important, but let's not neglect the fundamentals of effective leadership.

Once these are clearly established and understood, subordinates must know that they will be held accountable for the results achieved.

Establish and Maintain High Performance Expectation

By and large and within reason, managers get the type and level of job performance they expect or informally accept over a period of time. Low expectations breed low performance and apathy, while high expectations lead to high performance and a more demanding performance tone. Regarding low expectations, it is important to remember that standards can be set by default if one is not careful. Failure to confront lower than desired levels of performance is tantamount to acknowledging them as acceptable. High expectations means setting challenging but achievable goals. It means pinpointing exactly what you want, communicating it, and holding people accountable. It does not mean playing such games as: "If I as manager say I want this, I am pretty sure I can get that, and if I don't, it won't be too bad." Nor does it mean the subordinate giving all kinds of reasons for a low level of performance and the manager pretty well buying into the conversation, thus, getting the subordinate off the hook, so to speak. The focus of high expectations is not only on results as such, but on results which are challenging, motivating and attainable, results which provide people with a sense of accomplishment. Again, given some matters yet to be discussed, employees will generally perform at the level expected of them, and when performance levels are not what you would like, the reason is often that people are doing what they know will be accepted.

High expectations lead to high performance and a more demanding performance tone.

Let People Know Where They Stand

There are several dimensions to this aspect of results-oriented leadership. First, people must know where they stand with respect to the performance goals established, so that if those goals are not being met, they know precisely where they are falling short. This serves to reinforce attention to the achievement nature of the work climate. Also, it provides a vehicle for the superior and subordinate to discuss and reaffirm the goals and what needs to be done to achieve them, whether by the subordinate, the supervisor or both.

Just as important is letting people know when a job is being done well. So often in organizations we forget to "accentuate the positive" and can't understand why people are not more enthused. The answer may be that they feel nobody really cares anyway. In a situation like this, over a period of time the motivation to succeed will dwindle, and a concern for one's own interests will prevail. Recognition cannot amount to superficial "pats on the back," and it is the results accomplished which should receive emphasis. Recognition, like other leadership techniques, is another way of fostering mental and emotional involvement in a

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job, and can contribute significantly to the process by which organizational goals are internalized by employees. In other words, a strong sense of personal identification with organizational goals takes place because it is directly related to benefits for the individual. In this case, psychological reward is the form of recognition.

Employ Broad-Based Communication

Effective leadership requires a broad-based program of communication that is both organizationwide and manager-centered. An approach to communication which goes beyond basic job information can accomplish several things. It promotes a sense of identification, a feeling of being a more important part of a broader whole. This in turn fosters the interest, commitment and closeness which are so important to the process of internalization mentioned previously. Broad-based communication can foster a "team" atmosphere by promoting cooperation through better understanding on the part of everyone. It can get people thinking and talking about "their" organization and "their" job within that organization instead of falling back on the discouraged comment, "I just do my job. That's what I'm paid for." In short, increased supervisor-employee communication creates a feeling of importance, of being in on things.

Create a Supportive Climate

This is a common element of just about every framework for studying leadership that has been developed. In spite of this emphasis, "supportive climate" is very often misinterpreted, misapplied or inadequately defined. Among other things, a supportive climate would include the following behavior on the part of the manager:

- **Exhibiting confidence and trust by allowing subordinates to pursue goals without undue reporting, constant checking and other exaggerated forms of control**
- **Taking positive actions to contribute to employees' growth and development**
- **Discussing possible causes of and solutions to specific problems which are making an employee's job difficult**
- **Training and helping the subordinate to find better ways of doing the work**
- **Giving help and assistance in solving problems as opposed to always giving the answer**
- **Making available to the best of one's ability the physical resources required to do the job**
- **Seeking out and using employees' ideas on how to do the job rather than always projecting the "my way is the best way" image**
- **Being totally approachable so as to build something beyond a formal superior-subordinate relationship.**

Learn How to Delegate

Regarding managerial delegation, all of the following observations are significant:

- **Failure to delegate, according to most subordinates, is a common managerial error**
- **Sound delegation is a key determinant of the long-term growth and development of subordinates**
- **The true nature of delegation is not always clearly understood**
- **In addition to contributing to people's growth and development, delegation is a way of maximizing the use of a person's skill and ability, triggering motivation, and freeing the manager to manage, as opposed to becoming overly involved in details**
- **Delegation is a means by which we develop active, independent and responsible subordinates**
- **There are many credible reasons why, given certain circumstances, managers do not always delegate and why subordinates may not accept delegation. The bottom-line issue, however, is that properly paced and managed delegation is a hallmark of consistently effective leadership.**

Note that delegation is not dumping activities on people to perform, it is not imposing what are perceived as arbitrary standards on people and then applying pressure to have them met, it is not abdication or avoidance of decisions, and it does not mean that the manager loses control. Delegation does mean knowing how to handle and distribute responsibility, authority and accountability.

Assigning Responsibility: The assigning of responsibility is the phase of delegation which over the years has received the greatest emphasis. Most managers give their people a clear indication of the duties or tasks they are to perform. Similarly, most employees could give a quite adequate description of their job in terms of "operations." In assigning responsibility, however, the manager must go beyond the typical job description and specify what results are expected from the work. It is in this latter area that management has most often been remiss.

Delegation means knowing how to handle and distribute responsibility, authority and accountability.

In defining results expected, one must consider the following questions: For what do we pay people? Do we pay them for working some number of hours during which time they are expected to perform certain

tasks, or are we trying to achieve certain specified results through the performance of these tasks? The latter is much more logical. Accordingly, Hank Jones' job amounts to more than running a drill press or assembling component parts; instead, he is responsible for producing a given quantity of parts, for meeting certain quality requirements, for informing the supervisor when materials are in low supply, and so on. Similarly, the job of the production control manager goes beyond the design and day-to-day administration of a production-control program. The stated responsibility should also include minimizing lost time due to parts shortages, establishing the most economical work flow and equipment utilization, scheduling so that manufacturing occurs in the most economic lot sizes, and working with line managers on a continual basis to identify and overcome material flow problems. Delegation of responsibility requires a clear understanding and agreement between a manager and subordinates as to:

- **The activities or tasks they are responsible for performing**
- **The areas of the job in which they are responsible or accountable for achieving results**
- **The specific results for which they are accountable in each area**
- **The way performance will be measured in each area of responsibility.**

Granting Authority: A manager cannot grant authority without incurring some personal managerial and leadership obligations at the same time. The process of granting authority can be divided into two phases: preliminary planning and continuing support. Assuming understanding and agreement have been reached concerning the results expected, the planning phase of granting authority involves the following:

- **Having the subordinates present their ideas and plans as to how the desired results can best be achieved**
- **Raising questions, suggesting possible alternatives, and opening discussion in order to help them explore all aspects of the situation**
- **Helping subordinates identify potential problems that might arise and develop solutions to overcome them**
- **Reaching mutual agreement on the proposed course of action to be followed.**

The continuing support phase of granting authority was summarized by Drucker:

The manager has responsibility downward, to his subordinate managers. He has first to make sure they know and understand what is demanded of them. He has to help them set their own objectives. Then he has to help them reach these objectives. He is, therefore, responsible for their getting the tools, the staff, the information they need. He has to help them to do better.[1]

The granting of authority is a blending of two factors: a subordinate's skills, abilities, knowledge and potential to contribute, and a manager's guidance, counsel and help. According to Nathaniel Cantor:

The manager is responsible for helping the assistant to discover how he can perform his own objectives more effectively and how to make the best use of his potentialities to carry out his, the subordinate's assigned responsibilities.[2]

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Leadership Check List

1. Have I made it clear what is expected in terms of results? Do I discuss these results with employees?
2. Have I let the employees know where they stand?
3. Do the employees know how to do the work?
4. Have I done a good job of training and development?
5. Do I give employees all the support I can?
6. What have I done or not done to cultivate positive personal relationships?
7. Do the employees know why their jobs are important, how they fit into the coverall company structure, and the ramifications of poor performance?
8. Are employees kept informed on what is going on in the department and the company? Not just "need to know" items, but "nice to know"?
9. Do employees have adequate freedom in which to work?
10. Are employees too often put in a defensive position regarding performance?
11. What I have done to get employees mentally and emotionally involved in their jobs?
12. Have employees been allowed to participate in setting goals and deciding means of achieving them?
13. Have good aspects of performance received adequate and periodic recognition?
14. Do I accentuate the positive instead of the negative?
15. Have I shown adequate concern for employees as individuals? For their personal goals?
16. Am I flexible about listening to employees and giving them a chance to implement ideas and suggestions?
17. Have I ever consciously assessed employees' strengths and weaknesses with the idea of structuring the work to capitalize on the former?
18. Are employees adequately and reasonably challenged?

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Creating Accountability: Accountability on the part of the subordinate is the end production of delegation, and without this accountability, there is no true delegation. If a manager has been careful in assigning responsibility and granting authority, then the recipients must be held accountable for the results (good or bad) of their activities.

Establish Viable Appraisal and Coaching Programs

Performance Appraisal: Two of the main purposes of a coaching and development program should be to lay the groundwork for future improvement and to stimulate employees' desire for such improvement. The chances are good that these objectives will not be accomplished if performance appraisal dwells too heavily on the negative. People have a maximum tolerance level for the amount of criticism they can accept, whether it is aimed at several areas of performance or just one or two. Once this level is reached, further criticism merely makes employees defensive to the point of rejecting the manager's viewpoint.

Managers undertaking a performance review must especially guard against the tendency to overemphasize the negative aspects of performance in a particular area where they would like to see improvement. Instead, once it has been agreed that the area in question is an important one, the emphasis should be on developing plans for improvement. A second caution: avoid trying to accomplish too much, too soon. If there are several areas of concern, then the one or two most important issues should receive attention first and the rest be left for another time. Finally, remember that the negative effects produced by too much criticism cannot be offset by sandwiching in a few complimentary remarks here and there.

In addition, it should be remembered that like the rest of the management function, performance appraisal works best—i.e., eventually results in improved performance—when specific goals and plans for achieving them are established.[3]

Lastly, intentionally or not, many appraisal systems end up focusing on possible wage/salary action, rather than on improvement of future performance. Certainly, rewarding people on the basis of performance is important and should not be underemphasized. However, as soon as the wage/salary issue comes into play, planning for improvement tends to take a back seat. This would suggest that salary and performance reviews should be separated. Not only is such separation desirable, but the review for improving performance should be held first, thus ensuring that definite plans for improvement will be made, which in turn lays the groundwork for the wage/salary decision itself.

Coaching Program: Effective coaching is a day-to-day, not a once-a-year activity. The more time that managers spend in a supportive role with subordinates, rather than doing the work or telling them how to do it, the better the results will be. Their function should be one of discussing problems, getting agreement on objectives, and helping facilitate accomplishment of results by subordinates. Therefore, the process of coaching is a continuous and informal one which takes place as the need arises. This is not to suggest that a once-a-year formal review is not desirable. Indeed, this type of review has its advantages. Too often, however, it becomes a substitute for the day-to-day interaction between managers and their people.

Another weakness in many coaching systems is that the subordinate's role is a passive rather than a participative one. A successful program requires involvement and commitment on the part of the employee, so that the latter will be truly motivated to improve his or her performance. In this, as in any other area of work, the manager should tell employees what is expected of them; provide assistance and support when needed, as well as feedback on their performance; and reward them on the basis of results. ■

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